Is Political Moderation Ethnically Based? Italian/American Members of Congress and Congressional Polarization

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Introduction

According to the famous salad-bowl formulation, the United States is made up of millions of people with distinctive individual ethnic backgrounds. Each one of those people has an enormous and abstract assemblage of cultural norms, habits, traditions, and preferences that has been handed down from generation to generation. Yet some of these backgrounds constitute the "majority" while others are too often simply dismissed as "different" from that majority. This truism of American life must have important political consequences. In their seminal work *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*, Bernard Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee (1954) devoted great attention to the political impact of ethnic groups (illustrated by concepts such as the "Italian vote"), drafting an analysis that is arguably among those foundational to the entire subdiscipline of American political behavior (63). With the development of American politics as a field of study, scholars began to analyze more general questions related to political behavior, seemingly forgetting about the importance of ethnic-based politics, whereas scholars interested in ethnic studies, on the other hand, dedicated their attention to issues deemed more pressing—where discrimination was more blatant, crude, and widespread. As David A. Richards (1999, 2) pointed out, however, the relegation of some important groups to a less studied—and therefore implicitly less important—ethnic cohort suggests "the existence of a major disciplinary problem in the methodology of ethnic studies—the uncritical perpetuation of the silencing that such studies usually so rightly condemn." Ultimately, this article seeks to stimulate interest in the study of ethnicity and ancestry as important determinants of political behavior in the United States, thus helping to fill an immense gap within American political science. Its hypothesis is that membership in a specific ethnic group—Americans of Italian ancestry—is an important determinant of political behavior in that it influences and shapes the legislative voting behavior of sitting members of the U.S. House of Representatives, and so the beginning of this task will be analyzing the legislative behavior of Italian/American[1] members of the U.S. House of Representatives, specifically between 1972 and 2006.

In the following pages I will show that membership in this ethnic and/or ancestry group leads to political moderation, due to the fact that individuals who belong to these groups are accustomed to compromising between their own culture and the "dominant" culture. In order to test this hypothesis, it will be necessary to integrate concepts, elements, and findings from two disparate sets of political analyses: congressional electoral studies and ethnic politics. In the first part of the work, I review some of this relevant literature. I then proceed to present some descriptive data showing the political importance of Italian/Americans as an ethnic group in the United States and describing the legislative voting behavior of Italian/American members of the U.S. House of Representatives. In the third section I present the data set I use to test my hypothesis, while in the fourth part I specify my statistical model and briefly discuss the results. In conclusion, I present some avenues for future research.

Ethnicity, Representation, and Congressional Polarization

American scholars interested in questions of race, ethnicity, and political representation have shown that, in general, constituents tend to express higher levels of satisfaction when their elected representative belongs to their own racial or ethnic group (Tate 2001). The existing literature suggests that individuals can benefit in various ways from "descriptive representation"; that is, being represented by someone who shares one or more of their physical or personal characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, or occupation (cf. Pitkin 1967). On a structural level, this representation enhances the legitimacy of both the polity as a whole, by proving that it does not discriminate against certain groups, and of the minority group within the polity, by proving its members' ability to rule (Mansbridge 1999, 628). As Raymond E. Wolfinger (1966, 47) put it, "When the first Irishman was nominated for alderman in the mid-nineteenth century, this implied a recognition of the statesmanlike qualities of all Irishmen." On a more functional level, it creates a potential for improved communication between constituents and elected officials and promotes the full articulation of the specific demands of the minority group, due to a higher level of trust and understanding of the needs of the group (Mansbridge 1999, 628). According to some (Preuhs 2006, 598), "descriptive representation leads to political responsiveness," and, in some cases, its importance outweighs that of traditional determinants of legislative behavior, such as party allegiance. The number of studies that argue that the race and/or ethnicity of elected legislators determines to different degrees their behavior while in office is astonishing, even though none focus on Italian/Americans specifically (e.g., Nelson 1991;

Swain 1993; Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran 1996; Lublin 1997; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Haynie 2001, 2002; Preuhs 2001). Most of these analyses show that members of a particular racial or ethnic group are more successful than their nongroup member counterparts in including in the legislative agenda certain issues important to the minority group they represent.

If membership in a racial or ethnic group determines the behavior of legislators in terms of the issues they choose to involve themselves with, the larger question that remains unanswered is whether their legislative behavior is different from that of other legislators *tout court*. According to social and developmental psychologists, membership in an ethnic group leads to the acquisition of a set of qualities broadly defined as "bicultural competence." According to Teresa LaFromboise, Hardin L. Coleman, and Jennifer Gerton (1993), bicultural competence is expressed in terms of acquisition of, among other things, processes of bicultural efficacy, communication ability, and role repertoire. Bicultural efficacy refers to the ability of living "effectively, and in a satisfying manner, within two groups without compromising one's sense of cultural identity" (199, 404). In other words, it emphasizes the ability of members of the ethnic group to utilize negotiation in order to resolve conflicts (cf. Berry 2005). Communication ability and role repertoire refer to the skill of members of ethnic groups to express themselves in different contexts and utilize a wide range of culturally and/or situationally appropriate behaviors (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993, 405–407). Thanks to this particular bicultural competence, members of ethnic groups display particular ability and willingness to interact with members of other groups in order to achieve their goals (Phinney 1992). Consequently, they possess great "ability to achieve positive developmental outcomes in the context of adversity" (Lee 2005, 36).

In addition, existing research in psychology shows that European Americans tend to utilize compromise as their "conflict style" more than minority and racial groups (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). It is still unclear why European Americans are more prone to compromise than other groups beyond a slim reference to the strong cultural identity of European Americans. For the purpose of this study, it is sufficient to acknowledge the existence of this empirical difference, as it creates an expectation that Italian/Americans will, as a group, be prone to compromise as a method for conflict resolution.

In brief, psychologists provide us with a theoretical framework that seems to expect that individuals belonging to ethnic groups possess a general attitude toward compromise and negotiation based on bargaining and mutual understanding. They also show some empirical evidence pointing toward an additional and specific inclination of European Americans

toward resolving conflicts via compromise. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that, while serving in Congress, individuals belonging to certain ethnic groups will tend to exhibit legislative behavior—at least in part—informed by their more general ethnic-based behavior. When it comes to the issue of congressional polarization, their bicultural competence may very well be the cause of a more moderate behavior. Previous research has obtained mixed results while exploring the relationship between social identity and legislative voting behavior. In fact, while gender seems to be a quite important determinant of behavior (cf. Frederick 2009, 2010), personal religious affiliation seems to not influence the legislative voting behavior of members of Congress (MCs) (cf. D'Antonio, Tuch, and White 2008; Cann 2009), even though the religion of their constituents can be of enormous significance (cf. Green and Guth 1991). Given the current state of the existing literature, assessing the empirical relationship between membership in an ethnic group and legislative voting behavior becomes extremely important.

In the past few years, considerable attention has been dedicated by American scholars (Bond and Fleisher 2000; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Poole and Rosenthal 2001; Theriault 2006; Jones and McDermott 2009) to the issue of partisan polarization, especially within the U.S. Congress. Increasing polarization came through the replacement of less-polarized MCs by ideologically more extreme candidates and through the adaptation of the remaining members (Theriault 2006). If, according to Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal (2001, 18), "the Republicans [. . .] have taken a marked turn to the right while the Southern Democrats have become increasingly like their Northern counterparts," Sean M. Theriault (2006, 483) shows that progressive polarization occurred in both parties and in both chambers of Congress by explaining that "if the Democratic senators have taken one step toward their ideological home, House Democrats have taken two steps, Senate Republicans three steps and House Republicans four steps."

Even though the existence of an ongoing phenomenon of congressional polarization is considered an indisputable fact within the recent literature (e.g., Sinclair 2006), its causes are surrounded by much more disagreement. In fact, while some (e.g., Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1995; Aldrich and Rohde 2000) emphasize the change in the role of political parties through ideas such as "conditional party government," others tend to stress the effects of institutional reforms within Congress itself (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 1993; Theriault 2008). Still others turn to constituents, arguing that redistricting and gerrymandering create ideologically extreme districts (Carson et al., 2004), that increased income inequality causes polarization (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006), or simply that voters themselves move further

toward extremes (Bond 2001). However, constituent-based explanations tend to be rejected by analyses of policy preferences of voters (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005).

Regardless of the cause of congressional polarization, the fact that such a phenomenon occurs along partisan lines remains a key element in virtually all these analyses. In other words, political extremity or moderation are, by definition, measured along partisan ideological divides. In particular, scholars (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001) find an "ebb and flow" of responsiveness to district-specific preferences and national party allegiance by MCs between 1874 and 1996. They argue that, in the second half of the twentieth century, MCs who espoused the most radical views of their political party at any given point in time tended to receive less electoral support in the successive election. Similarly, Brandice Canes-Wrone, David W. Brady, and John F. Cogan (2002) expand these preliminary findings and demonstrate that roll-call support of political parties in general is an important electoral determinant; specifically, it has a negative impact on an MC's future electoral results and that, consequently, the probability of an MC retaining office decreases with roll-call support of his or her political party both in marginal and dependable districts.

Within this literature, the unanswered question is what else, other than partisan allegiance, may influence the more or less extreme political behavior of elected MCs? One of the most interesting answers to this question is Jeffrey Ladewig's (2010) retrospective roll-call voting theory. Ladewig develops a comprehensive member-specific incremental theory of legislative voting that unveils the link between electoral performance and congressional polarization. According to Ladewig (2010, 509), MCs "have a retrospective temporal lens to their decision-making calculus," in that they focus "their future utility, reelection maximization, on their own past electoral success." In other words, the more votes an MC receives, the more ideologically extreme he or she tends to become in the subsequent congressional session. Ladewig's study makes it possible to successfully model and predict how extreme an individual MC will be, according to his or her specific career pattern. Now that a theory of congressional polarization that goes beyond the idea of party support and defection exists, I believe it is possible to control for the ethnic-based determinants of congressional polarization.

Italian/Americans as an Ethnic Group

Even though there are virtually no political analyses of Italian/Americans as an ethnic group within the field of American politics focused on recent years, the political importance of the group is often recognized by political

scientists. Not only, as already mentioned above, do older studies make numerous references to Italian/Americans (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954), but some more recent analyses also sporadically use the ethnic group as a control variable (e.g., Meier and Holbrook 1992). In the United States, Italian/Americans constitute the second most numerous non–Anglo-Saxon ancestry group (cf. Praino 2012). Even more important, there are districts in the country where almost 40 percent of residents self-identify as Italian/Americans. The political consequences of this fact alone are of great importance. A recent historical study of the city of Utica, in upstate New York, for instance, shows that Italian/Americans have controlled an ethnic-based political machine of national influence in the area for almost a century (Bean 2010). Italian/Americans in this instance seized control of the Republican Party apparatus when the party was dominant in the early twentieth century, while other Italian/Americans controlled the Democratic Party during the New Deal and the years of Democratic ascension.

Shifting the attention from the presence of Italian/American constituents within a district to the electoral success of Italian/American candidates for public office, some descriptive data reveal that it is not merely a coincidence that both gubernatorial candidates in the state of New York in 2010 were Italian/Americans. Within all elections held for the U.S. House of Representatives between 1972 and 2006 twelve states[2] have seen the victory of an Italian/American candidate in over 10 percent of their elections. Twenty-seven states elected at least one Italian/American representative in the same period. Overall, Italian/American candidates won 499 electoral races in the U.S. House of Representatives in this period, a number that represents almost 10 percent of all races. Among these victories, 231 were located in the East, 109 in the West, 101 in the Midwest, and 58 in the South.

Italian/American MCs do not differ sociologically from their non–Italian/American colleagues in any meaningful way. Representation is comparable in terms of gender, education, age at first election, military service, and partisan affiliation.[3] Figure 1 graphically represents an index of the average political extremism[4] of members of the U.S. House of Representatives between 1972 and 2006. On average, Italian/American members of the House seem to be less extreme than their non–Italian/American counterparts. There is a clear trend toward higher levels of polarization for both Italian/American and non–Italian/American members, starting especially at the end of the 1980s, that is consistent with the literature on congressional polarization. However, there seems to be a correlation between Italian ancestry and moderation among members of the House.

Figure 2 shows how extreme the "most extreme" Italian/American and non–Italian/American members of the House were during the same period,

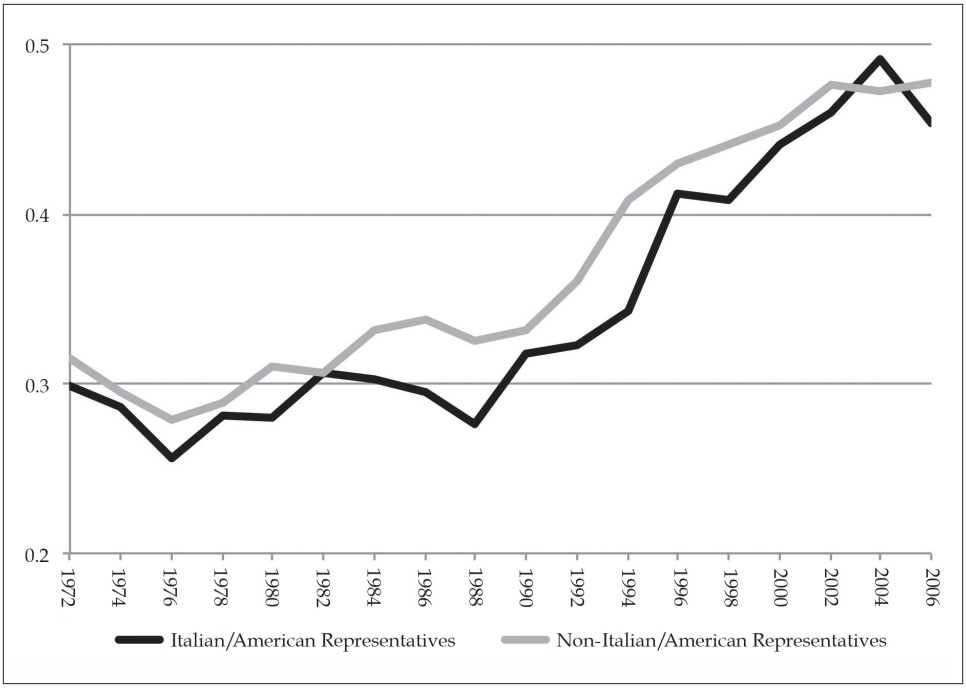

Figure 1. Index of Average Political Extremism for Italian/American and Non–Italian/American Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1972–2006.

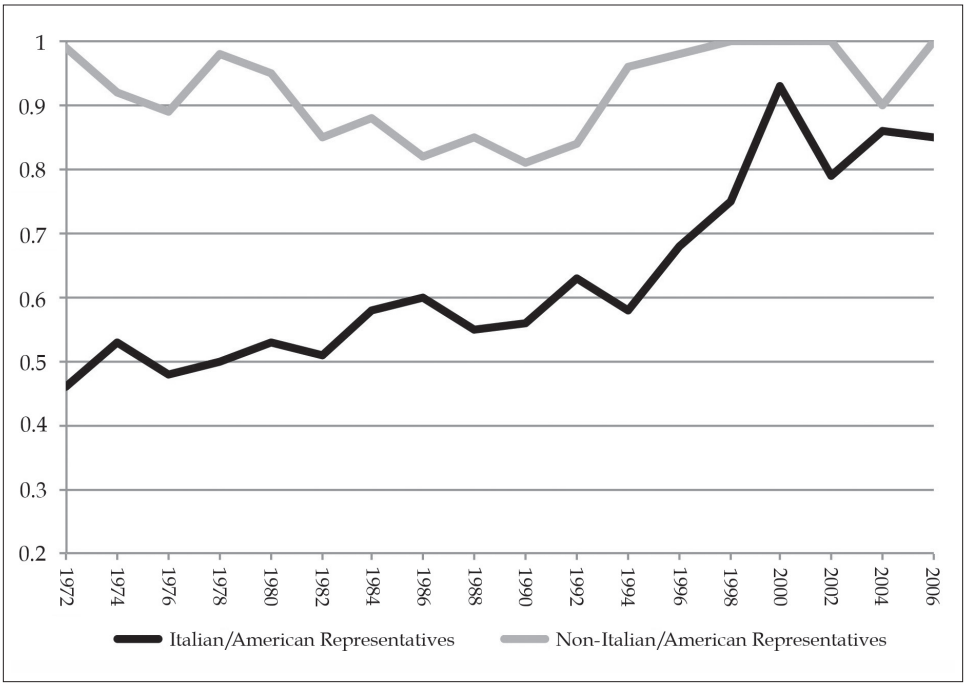

Figure 2. Index of Political Extremism of the "Most Extreme" Member of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1972–2006.

and it seems that Italian/Americans are less extreme than their non–Italian counterparts. Clearly, information about one individual does not constitute proof of a larger trend. However, for most of the time period analyzed, the most extreme Italian/American was substantially more moderate than his or her non–Italian counterpart, and that is an interesting piece of descriptive evidence.

Data and Methodology

In order to test my hypothesis that membership in this ethnic group leads to political moderation, I gathered data pertaining to all U.S. House of Representatives elections between 1972 and 2006, as compiled by the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives. The data set was coded in such a way as to allow the tracking of individual members of the House and the congressional districts where they were elected. To this data, I added district-specific data on the socioeconomic composition of every congressional district for the period of time analyzed. All socioeconomic data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau. Finally, I added to the data set Poole and Rosenthal's (1997) NOMINATE scores. NOMINATE scores are a measure of the ideology of individual MCs based on the analysis of their roll-call vote. It assumes a value that ranges from –1 (most liberal) to 1 (most conservative). Originally, Poole and Rosenthal developed two separate sets of scores, the W-NOMINATE scores and the DW-NOMINATE scores. The former allow for a comparison of the ideology of a single member across congresses but are not directly comparable between congresses for different members. The latter are directly comparable between congresses but fit the careers of individual members to a linear trend. Given the time-series cross-sectional nature of the current data, any model built will be making comparisons across congresses *and* across members. Therefore, it was necessary to use a modified version of the NOMINATE scores developed by Timothy P. Nokken and Keith T. Poole (2004), the so-called NP-NOMINATE scores, which are estimated congress-by-congress and allow comparisons across congresses without fitting to a linear trend the careers of individual members of the House.

Thanks to the data described above, it was possible to build a number of variables that, according to the existing literature, are necessary to estimate a model of ideological extremism. Since, as explained above, Ladewig (2010) successfully modeled extremism in the U.S. House of Representatives, the core of the model presented below is specified following his lead. Consequently, the dependent variable and some of the independent variables are calculated in accordance with his analysis.

In order to gauge the level of political extremism a member of the House expresses through his or her legislative voting behavior, the dependent variable "Ideological Extremity" is the absolute value of the NP-NOMINATE score associated with each individual member of the House for every congress. It ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 stands for perfect moderation, while 1 stands for absolute extremism. The right-hand side of the equation specified for the model presented below contains a number of theoretically informed covariates in addition to the main independent variable of interest.

The main independent variable of the analysis is, of course, the variable "Italian/American MC." It is a dichotomous variable coded 1 for all Italian/American MCs[5] elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in the time period contained in the analysis and otherwise designated 0. According to the retrospective roll-call voting theory (cf. Ladewig 2010), the share of the vote received by MCs in the election immediately before the successive election is the most powerful predictor of their legislative voting behavior. Consequently, the variable "Vote Share" is the percentage of the total vote obtained by every candidate during the most recent election, normalized for presentation purposes to a 0-to-1 range. In order to control for partisan-based explanations of political extremism, "Democrat" is a dichotomous variable, coded 1 for Democratic candidates and 0 otherwise. Finally, "Years in the House," represents the number of years each MC has served in the U.S. House of Representatives at the time of the election and provides an effective control for the seniority of individual MCs, which has been shown to have an effect on the overall vote share incumbent candidates receive (cf. Praino and Stockemer 2012a, 2012b).

In order to control for institutional swings of legislative voter behavior (cf. Ladewig 2010), three institutional variables are also included in the right-hand side of the equation. "House Majority Party," "Senate Majority Party," and "Presidential Party" are all dichotomous variables coded 1 if the political party of the candidate is the majority party in the House, in the Senate, or holds the presidency, respectively, and 0 otherwise. These control variables capture any difference in extreme behavior by MCs according to the current status of their own political party.

Finally, the equation also contains some district-specific variables that attempt to control for peculiar conditions in each individual congressional district that might influence the behavior of the MC elected. "District Partisanship" is a continuous variable that ranges from 0 to 1 and expresses the share of the presidential vote obtained in each congressional district by the presidential candidate of the member's political party. This variable is a widely used proxy for the underlying ideological makeup of individual congressional districts (cf. Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Praino,

Stockemer, and Moscardelli 2013). "Region South" is a dummy variable coded 1 for all Southern congressional districts and 0 for the remaining districts.

In order to control for socioeconomic factors that may influence the legislative behavior of individual MCs, the equation also includes variables that capture the socioeconomic makeup of individual congressional districts. Whereas the variable "Percentage of Young Voters (18–24)" is self-explanatory, "College-Educated Voters" is the percentage of people in each district over 25 years of age who have at least a college degree. "Racial Minority Voters" is the percentage of people in the district who belong to any racial group other than "white." All three variables were normalized for presentation purposes to a 0-to-1 scale. Finally, "Median Family Income (ln)" is the natural log of the median family income in each congressional district.

In addition to the three groups of variables discussed above, the right-hand side of the equation also contains Congress-specific variables for each electoral year between 1972 and 2006. These are all dichotomous variables coded 1 for the specific election year and 0 otherwise, leaving the elections to the 110th Congress—the most recent election included in the analysis—as the baseline, and they are important to capture any variation in the political extremity variable due to peculiar circumstances attributable to a specific legislature. They also capture any other more systematic difference between electoral cycles, such as the well-known differences between midterm elections and presidential elections, or any effect due to concurrent gubernatorial or any other kind of elections.

Specification of the Model and Results

Utilizing the "Ideological Extremity" variable as the dependent variable, the results presented below were calculated through the specification of a statistical model containing all the variables described above in the right-hand side of the equation. The existing literature suggests that the ideological positioning of individual MCs tends to be quite stable over time (cf. Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that ideologically extreme MCs will tend to be, on average, consistently extreme, just as more moderate members will tend to be consistently moderate, notwithstanding their personal movement through the moderate-extreme continuum due to certain conditions. This situation creates potential for some statistical complications, as a result of first-order autocorrelation. In fact, simple diagnostics performed on the data described above reveal the presence of autocorrelation within the error terms. In order to eliminate this problem, the model estimated below is a multilevel model (MLM) with the addition of random member-specific intercepts (cf. O'Connell and McCoach 2008).

FIXED EFFECTS	COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR
Intercept	0.08	0.154
Italian/American MC	−0.03**	0.015
Vote Share	0.06***	0.013
Democrat	−0.07***	0.006
Years in the House	−0.00***	0.000
House Majority Party	0.03***	0.003
Senate Majority Party	−0.01***	0.002
Presidential Party	−0.01**	0.002
District Ideology	0.00***	0.000
Region South	−0.05***	0.008
Young Voters (18–24)	−0.24**	0.104
College-Educated Voters	−0.04	0.042
Racial Minority Voters	0.10***	0.016
Median Family Income (ln)	0.03**	0.014
RANDOM EFFECTS		
Intercept	0.02	0.001
Residual	0.004	0.000
Log Likelihood	6,698.1	
N	6,666	

*$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.001$
Note: The Congress-specific variables are omitted from the table but included in the model specification.

Table 1. Ideological Extremity of MCs Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, 1972–2006

The results of the multivariate model contained in Table 1 largely confirm the pattern observed in the descriptive portion of this analysis. Even after controlling for a number of other factors known to influence and determine the spatial placement of MCs within the moderate-extreme continuum of legislative voting behavior, Italian/American MCs are less extreme than the average non–Italian/American MC.

Overall, the coefficients obtained by the MLM for the control variables largely confirm the findings of the existing literature on extremism in legislative voting behavior (cf. Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Ladewig 2010). Quite interesting are the results obtained by the socioeconomic, district-specific control variables—most of them seem not to have an impact on the extremism of the legislative voting behavior of their district's MC, but the presence of young voters and racial minorities within the district seems to have a very significant impact. Young voters seem to make the legislative voting behavior of MCs more moderate, but the presence of racial minorities within these districts has a very clear effect of resulting in a move toward extremes. If the data show that Italian/American MCs are less extreme in their legislative voting behavior than non–Italian/American MCs, this deserves some further thought.

First of all, the small coefficient reported by Table 1 for the variable "Racial Minority Voters" must be contextualized. In fact, the model predicts that, keeping everything else constant, in a district where the absolute majority of voters (50.1 percent) belong to racial minority groups, its MC's "Ideological Extremity" score will be 0.050 points larger than those of other MCs. Such variation is, therefore, quite large and important, in comparison to the coefficients obtained by both my MLM and by models estimated by others within the existing literature (e.g., Ladewig 2010).

Conclusion

This article shows that Italian/American MCs are, on average, more moderate in their legislative voting behavior than their non–Italian/American counterparts. This moderating impact of belonging to this ethnic group stands even after controlling for all the factors that the existing literature has shown have great influence in determining how extreme MCs are and/or become in time. This finding seems to provide solid empirical evidence confirming the theoretical expectation expressed by social psychologists that individuals belonging to an ethnic group are inclined to resolve conflicts utilizing compromise due to their bicultural competence. This adds to both the literature on congressional polarization and the literature on the relationship between social identity and legislative voting behavior. In fact, the results discussed above show that there is a direct relationship between ancestry and ethnicity and legislative voting behavior. However, at least two separate considerations are in order here.

First, as this study is based on only one ancestry/ethnic group, its generalization properties merit some further thought. While the theory utilized here in order to explain the moderation of Italian/American MCs (i.e., the idea of bicultural competence) is not specific to Italian/Americans, other ancestry/ethnic groups may or may not present similar behavioral patterns. In fact, the degree of cultural integration and assimilation, the specific history of discrimination within the larger society, as well as the socioeconomic status of the group as a whole may all create different outcomes. Consequently, scholars should expand the type of analysis presented here to other ancestry, ethnic, and even racial groups.

Second, this analysis deals with the dichotomy of moderation/extremism. While extremely important, it also presents several limits. Future studies should expand from this narrow, unidimensional approach to policy analysis, adding some nuance to the infinite possible differences across policy positions of individual MCs. A complete analysis of the roll-call vote of Italian/American MCs would also allow us to find out how exactly the

idea of bicultural competence works within Italian/American legislators and how exactly an Italian/American MC determines his/her placement within a multitude of possible policy positions. These are all important issues that cannot be answered at the present moment.

The analysis presented above, while largely confirming the results of previous works, also sheds some light on the currently understudied relationship between race, ethnicity, ancestry, and congressional polarization. In fact, the idea that race, ethnicity, and ancestry may play very different roles in determining whether MCs are more or less extreme in their legislative voting behavior needs further and more systematic analysis. The results presented above show that while MCs belonging to a particular ethnic/ancestry group (i.e., Italian/American MCs) tend to be more moderate than all other MCs (i.e., non–Italian/American MCs), congressional districts with elevated numbers of racial minorities tend to elect more extremist MCs. This work seeks to build some interest in this largely unexplored area of an important and growing branch of congressional research, while concomitantly attempting to begin filling the immense gap within American politics created by the lack of interest in some ethnic groups and their political behavior.

Notes

1. The conscious choice throughout this article of uniting the terms "Italian" and "American" with the use of a slash—as in "Italian/American"—in opposition to the more common use of a hyphen—as in "Italian-American"—is the result of a very well known debate within the field of Italian/American studies, where the hyphen has been accused of visually perpetrating and widening the ideological gap between the dominant culture and the outside culture (cf. Tamburri 1991).
2. These states are Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania in the East, Minnesota in the Midwest, Mississippi in the South, and Colorado, Nevada, Oregon, and Wyoming in the West.
3. Italian/American women are just as underrepresented as non–Italian/American women. Most MCs from both groups are in possession of either a bachelor's or a master's (or other professional) degree. They all tend to get elected to Congress for the first time while in their mid-40s. Both groups have fewer and fewer MCs with military experience. They are almost evenly divided between the two major political parties.
4. This index was built utilizing Congress-by-Congress NOMINATE scores, or NP-NOMINATE (cf. Nokken and Poole 2004). In the section where I describe the variables of my model, I present a more complete explanation of what NOMINATE scores are and explain the reasons why I choose to utilize NP-NOMINATE scores instead of the better-known DW-NOMINATE scores. For the moment, it is enough to explain that the index was built utilizing the absolute value of the NP-NOMINATE score associated with the term of individual candidates who were elected in the years in the figure. Therefore, the index ranges from zero (perfectly moderate) to one (perfectly extremist), regardless of political party affiliation.

5. Coding this variable was a challenging task. While other minorities in the U.S. Congress have their own organizations—such as the Congressional Black Caucus or the Congressional Hispanic Caucus—and, therefore, it is easy to obtain a complete list of its members, Italian/Americans currently do not enjoy such structures. I was able to obtain incomplete lists of Italian/American members of Congress for some of the most recent years through the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF). Some Italian/American members disclose their ancestry in their official websites, while others simply do not. After reviewing NIAF's lists and the personal biographies and websites available, it was necessary to manually code everyone else based on their last names. While this method is not perfect, to my knowledge it is the most complete list of Italian/American members of the House that can be obtained.

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